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JAPANESE - AMERICANS

OUR HERITAGE

Japanese Americans

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for

BOARD OF NATIONAL MISSIONS
Evangelical and Reformed Church

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Rev. J. Mori, graduate of North Japan College, Sendai, Japan, and of Heidelberg College, Tiffin, Ohio, first pastor of First Evangelical and Reformed Church, San Francisco, California

According to the Records

Ten Holy Terrors rebelled as did all teen-agers, against the restrictions imposed by their parents. But these young people had an extra burden. Their parents were Japanese, and their home-life had much of the Oriental traditions and concept of personal behavior and social relationship. Outside of their homes and in the schools, the Holy Terrors were drinking deep of the American way of life. Indeed, each of them had one foot in the Orient, and the other in America. To these the Evangelical and Reformed Church reached out in Christian fellowship.

While at Heidelberg College at Tiffin, Ohio, a young Japanese student preparing for the ministry felt a moving call to work among his people who were new arrivals in this land of opportunity. He himself had come from his native Japan to the shores of California. Rev. J. Mori, so impelled, went as a missionary to San Francisco in September of 1910, and commenced immediately to gather a flock and conduct prayer meeting services. On October 30, 1910, the group was duly organized as the First Reformed Church in San Francisco under the auspices of the Board of Home Missions of the Reformed Church in the United States.

Thus began an outreach of our church to a new minority group. This friendly gesture of concern, assistance and guidance represented the Christian witness to immigrant folks who faced known prejudice and discrimination, and who were overcome by bewilderment at the adjustments to be made in a new land.

With Sunday services, preceded by street-corner meetings, and with classes in English and in the Bible, Mr. Mori undertook the task of the Christian evangelization of those whose religious background was largely Buddhist. A nucleus helped to mold the church organization, which met first in a rented three-story dwelling-house. Here were facilities for a meeting room, class and social rooms, and living quarters for the missionary.

Among his nine-man "organizing committee" was Tsuneo Tani, whose contribution to the work of the church included beating the drum or holding the banner in the weekly street-corner services, and making the \$10 cash deposit which began the acquisition of the large frame church building on Post Street purchased in 1913 from the Plymouth Congregational Society for \$25,000. Baptized earlier by an Episcopalian minister, Tsuneo Tani was married by Mr. J. Mori in 1911. The one chosen to be his wife had just completed three years in a Methodist school at Tokyo.

Within a few years, Mr. Mori appealed to the Board of Home Missions for an American assistant. Consequently, Miss Carrie M. Kerschner, Preceptress at the Allentown College for Women, now Cedar Crest, accepted the challenge of the board and in 1914 became "missionary teacher." During her service of five years, the English night school flourished, the Sunday school grew, Daily Vacation Bible schools were held yearly, a choir was organized, classes in home making were conducted, and a Women's Missionary society was organized.

Early Days

To Mr. and Mrs. Tani, the first married couple in the congregation, was born Henry Tani, whose memories of the early church days include the kindergarten conducted at the church, and whose first teacher was Miss Kerschner, who

later became the executive secretary of the Women's Missionary Society of General Synod of the Reformed Church. This kindergarten was unique in its service since most of the children came from Japanese-speaking homes, and this was their first adjustment to an English-speaking situation.

That Miss Kerschner and others came to work in this mission spoke highly of the interest of the women in our church. The Women's Missionary Society made this a significant project and undertook the construction of a \$41,000 two-story community house and gymnasium adjoining the church structure. This was completed and dedicated late in 1923.

With these two buildings located strategically in what was then the heart of the San Francisco Japanese community, it was natural that the First Reformed Church became not only the actual but the symbolic center of Christian influences in the city and in all Northern California. The facilities thus provided were by far the best that any Japanese group had at their disposal. Basketball leagues, cooking and sewing classes, a Boy Scout troop, the *Fujinkai* (Women's Association), study classes, dramatic group, besides the youth groups and Sunday school functions of the church took full advantage of the buildings. Community activities, lectures, forums, concerts, conferences, dinners and even large weddings and funerals made use of this Reformed Church.

The San Francisco church also furnished students for the ministry. Rev. K. Namekawa, Rev. T. Kaneko, Rev. H. Y. Saito, Rev. Sohei Kowta, and Rev. Francis Hayashi studied either at Heidelberg College or Central Seminary at Dayton before the Evangelical and Reformed merger. Both Mr. Namekawa and Mr. Saito returned to Japan to conduct their Christian ministry there, though Mr. Namekawa died during the recent war. Today Mr. Saito is min-

ister of the Omori Christian Church at Tokyo. Mr. Kaneko has been until recently with the First Church, ministering to the older Japanese-speaking members in San Francisco, while Mr. Kowta, who succeeded Mr. Mori as pastor of the San Francisco church, has become a Presbyterian minister, serving now in Los Angeles. Mr. Hayashi is presently a Methodist minister in Portland, Oregon.

International relations came to a crisis in 1924 when the U. S. Congress enacted in their new immigration bill the provision that no further Japanese immigration be allowed, while other nations were put on a quota basis. This discriminatory feature, plus the fact that those of Oriental birth were denied naturalization privileges, bore testimony to the anti-Oriental forces operating on the west coast. Housing and job restrictions confined them to undesirable living quarters and to limited vocational opportunities. In this unhappy situation, the home missions challenge stirred the church at large to provide the leavening influence in their lives. Especially was this of consequence to the younger generation who faced the future as American citizens in a hostile community.

Congregation at 20th anniversary, 1930. Rev. Sohei Kowta, pastor



Nisei Take Responsibility

Thus did Henry Tani, among others, find nurture within the mission church. Confirmed by Mr. Kowta, and led in youth work by Mr. Saito, he in turn taught a Sunday school class, became active in the Christian Endeavor Society, both in the local church and in the Golden Gate C. E. Union of the city, and in the Young People's Christian Conference which embraced the Nisei youth of all the Japanese churches in Northern California.

It was at this time that George Nishimoto, as a Sunday school teacher and as a leader, took a major share of the responsibilities within the church. With a background of YMCA participation, with athletic and dramatic abilities, he sparked the English-speaking program in the church and the development of a more dominant Nisei Council, which assumed leadership of the Sunday school, the youth program, and the English-speaking morning services.

In the years 1938-1941, sent by the Board of National Missions of the merged Evangelical and Reformed Church after they had been imbued with the idea implanted by Mr. Mori himself, Rev. and Mrs. Arthur Felkley, fresh from Eden Seminary, served as missionaries to the younger generation in the San Francisco situation. The Felkleys can be credited with such exceptional achievements as helping the people appreciate their role in the total denomination, and also improve their choir-work and worship services. The Nisei were just coming into their own when Pearl Harbor abruptly changed their established pattern.

Evacuation

The story of the compulsory evacuation of all persons of Japanese descent from the Pacific Coast in the spring of 1942 with their subsequent confinement in relocation centers



31ST ANNIVERSARY SERVICE
FIRST EVANGELICAL & REFORMED CH.
SAN FRANCISCO, NOVEMBER 2, 1940

The last formal group picture before the war

has been told and retold in church circles. Newly-married Henry Tani left a growing insurance business, while George Nishimoto's family left a thriving laundry business at a tragic loss. Thrown into close quarters with 8,000 others, first in the Tanforan Assembly Center, then at the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah, they showed the effect of their Christian background in their adjustment to this emergency.

George Nishimoto promptly took an interest in the recreational program within the center, while Henry Tani as chairman of an "education committee" soon set up a temporary school system, staffed completely with evacuee personnel. Since the Nisei were denied teaching positions in the California public schools, there were really few trained teachers, though they did have the academic background for handling high school subjects.

It was in these early weeks and months of agonizing adjustment that the ministry of Rev. and Mrs. Carl Nugent, assigned to the First Church upon their hasty return from

Japan, had proved a blessing. Indeed, the Nugents were not alone in this, since the whole Protestant Church in the nation took this wartime concentration as a distinct challenge peculiar to the Christian conscience.

The experiences in the Tanforan Assembly Center turned George Nishimoto to the possibility of serving people through the Christian ministry. Guided by Rev. Nugent, and with the aid of the Board of National Missions, he left the center and embarked on the three-year theological study at Eden Seminary. His student days were busy ones, since he was called on to address church groups, interpreting the situation which created the relocation centers, but more to present himself as another Christian young man whose hopes and aspirations were not different because of his Japanese parentage. As summer camp counsellor and teacher, as assistant minister, and as pastoral supply, he was warmly received wherever he went.

Meanwhile, Henry Tani stayed through the second movement from Tanforan to Topaz, and was associated again with the high school program, though this time the school system was officially organized and accredited. He made a significant contribution to the morale of these teen-age

Rev. Nugent greets Topaz worshippers



youngsters by interpreting the needs of the students to the relocation center administration, and conversely, the wartime necessity of confinement to the students. In an unnatural community setting, the school came closest to being a natural experience.

Our Board of National Missions, as the spokesman for our church, administered funds provided through Emergency World Service which appropriated money to work amongst the evacuees, and looked with special concern at the plight of the Nisei students who would normally have gone to college, had not evacuation disrupted their families' economic status. Thus, during the war years, our church assisted 52 students directly with scholarship aid exceeding a total of \$22,000. Of these 52 students, 25 were previously associated with our San Francisco Japanese Church. Eight of the total were enrolled at Heidelberg College, eleven at Elmhurst College, three at Eden Seminary and two at Mission House, while the rest attended various other institutions. The influence of these students upon the campuses, upon their fellow students, and the benefits to themselves combined to ease the transition from the barbed-wire communities to life in the Midwestern cities.

The evacuation experience brought Mr. Tani and his family into the larger church family. A visit by a field secretary of the Board of National Missions into the Tanis' barracks room led to an invitation for him to attend several of the summer youth camps of the denomination in 1943. This done, he went back to Topaz to take over the high school duties, when another invitation to make more presentations in behalf of National Missions brought him into several more synods and churches. On his second trip to Utah he was invited to join the office staff of the Board of National Missions in the St. Louis office. This was accepted and in January 1944, the Henry Tani family moved into suburban Maplewood.

Fruits of the Church

Mr. Tani's pride in the work of the San Francisco Japanese church is shown in the manner in which a high-school crowd to which he was adviser has found in the church a springboard to a high level of attainment in spite of, and perhaps, because of, their war-disrupted lives. The "Holy Terrors," as these ten young people named themselves, was a natural grouping of five boys and five girls with a bit more imagination, ability and response than others. They gave fire to youth activities, to the choir, to the larger circles to which they belonged. By the time of Pearl Harbor all of them had graduated from high school. A summary review, now ten years later, reveals that all ten had gone on to college, seven of them graduating and receiving in addition such advanced degrees as Medical Doctor, Masters in Business Administration, and a Ph.D. in Agronomy. Eight are married, one couple from within the group. They are located today in Philadelphia, Washington, Columbus, Detroit, Chicago and San Francisco. In most cases, they are associated with an Evangelical and Reformed church in their neighborhood. Two have seen military service, one with the famed all-Nisei 442nd Combat Team in Europe, the other in the intelligence service in Japan. Thus their diversified lives bear testimony to the important work of the Christian church in touching even these lives of an unwanted minority element.

In recent years, three girls from First Church married ministers and thus joined the ranks of "full-time Christian workers." Fujiko Sugimoto, better known as "Fudge" during her student days at Heidelberg, married an Episcopalian, Rev. Daisuke Kitagawa, now in Minneapolis; Eiko Hosoi, who studied Christian education at Eden Seminary, married a Congregational student, Hiro Katayama, and they now live in Berkeley; and Sophie Abe is now Mrs.

Norio Ozaki, whose husband ministers to the Japanese Congregational Church in Fresno, California.

Miss Masako Amemiya stands prominently in this list as one who also studied at Eden Seminary in preparation for her duties as a parish worker. Her first assignment was at Christ E. and R. Church in Philadelphia, where she served this downtown parish in a changing neighborhood. Subsequently, she became associated with the American Friends Service Committee, under whose sponsorship she spent a summer at a Finland work camp, and for two years since helped to direct the weekend workcamps in Philadelphia. Miss Mary Matsumoto, graduate of Elmhurst, is a commissioned parish worker, assisting Rev. George Nishimoto as program director in the very successful Ellis Community Center in south-side Chicago.

Integration

Once the focus of our church on Japanese work in America was on Post Street in San Francisco where the church and educational buildings of the First Church ministered for 30 years previous to Pearl Harbor. We now look with special pride at the three-story frame house at 4430 Ellis Avenue in Chicago's south-side purchased by our Board of National Missions toward the development of a community program under the leadership of Mr. Nishimoto.

This marked a sharp change from the position taken by the board in the war years when the Japanese-American evacuees were leaving the relocation centers to settle in the many Midwestern communities. The byword then was "integration" by which was meant the rapid assimilation away from the segregated all-Japanese community to the more desirable nonsegregated adjustment to neighborhood patterns. Just as the word "Americanization" included the adoption of the language, clothes and eating habits, as well

as a leveling of the educational, cultural and even religious standards to the "American Way of Life," so did integrations suggest progress toward achievement of these ends.

Specifically, our Board of National Missions, committed to the integration program, placed Mr. Nugent and Mr. Nishimoto on the staff of the United Ministry to Resettlers under the Church Federation of Greater Chicago. It was their task to relate as many as possible of the resettled families to established churches in the neighborhood where they lived. This would be integration. It was true that in the realm of housing and in jobs integration was proceeding satisfactorily in Chicago as in other Midwestern cities.

Indeed, there were evidences that this program was succeeding. Instances were cited where newly resettled families had found their new church home most friendly and their participation most welcome. In fact, some had assumed positions of leadership within the church program. But two years of this ministry proved that the integration into the existing churches failed to materialize for the mass of the 20,000 Japanese-Americans new to Chicago.

Two factors seemed to bar the way. In the first place, there was the natural reluctance on the part of established congregations to welcome these newcomers whose racial ancestry proved a hindrance to their full participation in Christian church life. Especially embarrassing was the fact that the board could not find even one of our denomination's Chicago churches willing to provide office space for Mr. Nishimoto to promote the integration program. On the other hand, there was the greater reluctance on the part of the resettlers themselves to break completely from the segregated pattern into which they had been forced on the Pacific Coast, and more recently in the relocation centers. It might be explained that individuals in such circumstance are not "prepared" adequately to leave the shelter of their segregated community, and hence are fear-

ful of venturing out beyond their own. This "degree of readiness" of each individual would then determine whether or not he was prepared for complete integration into American life.

It is at this point that the home missions program has a peculiar task all its own. The Christian church responds to the needs of minority and neglected groups within our borders, and in the case of the resettling Japanese in Chicago, as in San Francisco almost 40 years ago, a Christian center to increase the "degree of readiness" was established. Thus Ellis Community Center was dedicated on February 15, 1948.

Starting modestly with a day-nursery for pre-school children, Ellis Center assumed a responsible position in the community life by the impact it has made within its first full year of operation. At its first anniversary in February, 1949, Mr. Nishimoto, its director, spoke modestly but significantly of the achievements: a day nursery having 45 children in two sessions; a young people's group called the Work Campers numbering as many as 70 and meeting weekly; a Mothers' Club meeting monthly; a Sunday school of 75 children; and a Sunday morning worship averaging 50 in attendance with 23 becoming members of the congregation. In time, Ellis Community Center has been accepted as a church in the North Illinois Synod.

Ellis Center carried on an extensive program during the first year which included after-school playtime; home visitations; Kiddies' Matinee; craft club; four-weeks vacation school; five age-group clubs including Cubs and Camp Fire Girls; special interest groups, such as boys' choir, instrumental music, piano lessons, Charm School, Japanese cooking and language classes, bridge instructions; and the Sunday evening cultural program. The center also conducted a leadership training school assisted by a Youth Caravan; opened a branch of the Chicago Public Library;



Ellis Center nursery makes use of facilities that are available

observed "appreciation week," when groups within the center took specific interior decoration assignments; and sent out a caroling group at Christmas.

This broad community program reflects the leadership inspired by Mr. Nishimoto, whose enthusiasm and personal abilities are enhanced by his wife, Toshi, who assumes a generous portion of the tasks of the center. So that he can give time to the usual parish responsibilities of the ministry, Mr. Nishimoto has drawn a loyal group of 21 volunteer staff workers who give 49 hours per week. Miss Matsumoto, as program director, and Miss Rhoda Nishimura, parish worker, are valuable assistants. The Board of National Missions has provided a station wagon to aid in the nursery program.

Though his program is built up primarily for the Japanese folks, there are representatives of other races and creeds within its many activities. In the crowded apartments of south-side Chicago, and in the adjustments to a

more stable livelihood, Ellis Center with its Christian atmosphere and fellowship touches the lives of 300 individuals every week.

Serving in Larger Capacity

Coming to the Board of National Missions' St. Louis office as a bookkeeper in 1943, Henry Tani has become identified with the national missions program of the church in his appearances in the churches, in summer youth camps and in Women's Guild conferences. Dr. I. George Nace, general secretary of the board, states:

"Because of Mr. Tani's training at Stanford University, the board assigned him the important task of taking care of its books and accounts. This task was so efficiently and faithfully performed that the Board elevated him to assistant treasurer, in which capacity he is a member of the staff.

"The work of Mr. Tani is doubly important because the board has two treasurers, one for its general fund, Mr. Maurice G. Lipson of Indianapolis, and one for its building fund, Mr. O. C. Grueninger of St. Louis. Again and again both of these men have expressed high commendation for the work of Mr. Tani, for the manner in which he assumed responsibility, and for his dependability at all times.

"In a real sense, Mr. Tani is a product of the missionary work done among the Japanese people who came to the shores of America at an earlier date and settled on our West Coast."

Mr. and Mrs. Tani and their three sons, Richard, Steven and John, have become well established in their Maplewood home just west of the St. Louis city lines. While Mrs. Tani assumes the important task of home maker, Mr. Tani has taken such other responsibilities as treasurer of Fellowship Center board, chairman of the interracial vesper Fellow-

ship Church, member of a local P. T. A. executive board, and shares in the leadership among the 300 Japanese-Americans in St. Louis. The Tani family were members of the Webster Groves E. and R. Church where they participated in all activities of the church, but recently transferred membership to Christ E. and R. Church in Maplewood.

In the interest of furthering the welfare of the Japanese in America, the Japanese American Citizens League, with its 70 local chapters from coast to coast, has promoted educational and legislative programs to restore and improve their status, dramatically reduced to a low state with the forced evacuation in 1942. The JACL had assisted in the passage of the Evacuation Claims Bill, and seeks enactment of a bill to provide equal opportunity for naturalization and immigration to those of Japanese ancestry. In this organization, Mr. Tani has held local, regional and national responsibilities.

In Retrospect

In the lives of these and others, the national missions program proves again and again that by touching these otherwise neglected individuals, the church does something to itself in the process. By sending missionaries abroad to Japan, we find ourselves responsible for immigrants from Japan, and thus we start a home missions project in California. The relocation experience has thrown many of these into contact with our local churches, and thus the cycle is complete.

From Post Street to Ellis Avenue, from San Francisco to Chicago, from immigrants fresh from Japan to completely Americanized citizens, from Buddhist homes to Christian families, from concentrated West Coast Japanese towns to the breadth of the American continent, the church has influenced a segment of our population.

*Rev. and Mrs.
George Nishimoto*



*The
Henry Tani
Family*

